



ANDY FREEBERG

The Portrait Maker



Andy Freeberg was born in New York City and studied at the University of Michigan. He began working professionally as a photojournalist in New York with assignments for magazines such as *Rolling Stone*, *Time*, *The Village Voice* and *Fortune*. At the time, Freeberg specialized in environmental portraits. In 1990, he moved to Northern California where he currently lives and alternates his assignment work with personal projects.

Freeberg's project, *Sentry, Gallery Desks in Chelsea*, was presented in a one-man show at the Danziger Projects Gallery in New York City in September 2007 and received critical acclaim in the *New York Times*, *The New Yorker* and many other publications. Karen Sinsheimer, curator of photography at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, selected Freeberg's *Sentry* series as a *Discovery of the Meeting Place* at Fotofest 2008 and the photos will be exhibited at the 2010 Fotofest in Houston.

His current project, *Guardians of Russian Art Museums*, was selected for the book prize at Photo Lucida's Critical Mass 2008 and it will be published and available in March 2010. *Guardians* was also selected as a winner at the Hearst 8 x10 Biennial, in New York City. Prints have been purchased for the permanent collections at MFA Boston, The Portland Art Museum, and MFA Houston. His work is represented by the Kopeikin Gallery in Los Angeles where he will have a show of *Guardians* opening in March 2010. The Clark Gallery in Boston will also exhibit *Guardians* in April 2010.

www.andyfreeberg.com

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Capturing The Story

The *Guardians* is a series of photos of Russian women who work as guards in art museums in Moscow and St. Petersburg. On a trip to Russia in 2008 I saw these women on a visit to the Hermitage Museum and I was intrigued with how they were part of the experience of looking at the art. I began to photograph them and on subsequent trips I was able to speak with some of them through a translator and was surprised to find how interested they were in their jobs. They were knowledgeable about the art and many of them were retired professionals. I met guards who had been economists, dentists, teachers, and archivists. A woman in Moscow's State Tretyakov Gallery Museum said she often returns there on her day off to sit in front of a painting that reminds her of her childhood home. Another guard travels three hours to work and back each day, since at home she would just sit on her porch and complain about her illnesses, 'as old women do.' She would rather be at the museum enjoying the people watching, surrounded by the history of her country.

The Guardians features 36 images captured by Andy Freeberg of women who guard the art in Russian museums. His work covered four Russian museums: the Hermitage and Russian State Museum in St. Petersburg, and the Tretyakov Gallery and Pushkin Museum in Moscow. The work, which was captured in 2008 and 2009, shows stoic figures of Russian women guarding valuable art, placing them in the position of a subject equally as intricate and as captivating as the art they are guarding.

The women, their physical relationship with the art, the unknown narrative of their lives, their clothes, posture, and expression, all play a part in adding an entirely new dimension to the art work that seems to be overlooking the women themselves, almost guarding *them* from their high positions on the walls and stands, rather than the other way around. The women become a focal point of the voyeur.

It is impossible to ignore the relationship between these women and the pieces they guard. Both imprint on one another to an extent that most of these women become three-dimensional extensions of the art work they are guarding.

The Guardians series will be published in a book by Photolucida and will be available in early 2010. For more information about *The Guardians* book, visit www.guardiansbook.com.

“ They are the guardians of the country's masterpieces, but also of much more. This series of photographs reflects the singular role that these women play in both the Russian art world and society as a whole.”

— from the introduction by Clifford Levy, Moscow bureau chief of the *New York Times*